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OMICRON SURGE HURTS BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

According to the Business Conditions Survey conducted last week by the state's peak business organisation, Business NSW, business confidence in the Illawarra remains subdued in the wake of the Omicron surge.

Business Illawarra Executive Director, Adam Zarth, said that the results of the survey were unsurprising and called on COVID-negative members of the community to help rebuild confidence by getting out and supporting local businesses.

"The triple challenge of isolating staff, hesitancy in the community and supply chain disruption has seen the continuation of low business confidence within the region, rather than the spike in summer trade that we hoped for," said Mr Zarth.

"These results are unsurprising because instead of enjoying a booming holiday season, Illawarra businesses in the tourism, accommodation, hospitality, and retail sectors have struggled to keep the doors open amid staffing shortages, supply chain issues and quieter trade."

"As a community, it's now down to us to play our part in building back business confidence by getting back out to support them – and the impending supply of Rapid Antigen Tests will be essential to doing this safely."

The survey also showed that during the Omicron surge, 61 per cent of NSW businesses are concerned about having to shut their doors temporarily because of staff shortages driven by workers having to self-isolate if they either had COVID or are a close contact of somebody with it. Additionally, 45 per cent of respondents indicate that they are now concerned about the actual viability of their business longer term.

"The number of businesses potentially now having to close either temporarily or permanently is quite alarming and why we have successfully advocated for the gradual relaxation of self-isolation restrictions when it is safe to do so."

"We know from previous experiences that our economy bounces back strongly when we get on top of the virus, restrictions lift and the associated confidence of the consumer and businesses alike rebounds, and we look forward to that happening sooner rather than later," said Mr Zarth.

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About Business Illawarra

Formerly the Illawarra Business Chamber, *Business Illawarra* is the region's peak business organisation, and the regional office of Business NSW responsible for the south-east of the state, including the Southern Highlands.

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